

AT A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF MONTGOMERY  
COUNTY, VIRGINIA HELD ON THE 10<sup>TH</sup> DAY OF APRIL, 2003 AT 7:00 P.M. IN THE  
BOARD CHAMBERS, MONTGOMERY COUNTY GOVERNMENT CENTER, 755  
ROANOKE STREET, CHRISTIANSBURG, VIRGINIA:

PRESENT:	Larry N. Rush	-Chairman
	Annette S. Perkins	-Vice Chairman
	John A. Muffo	-Supervisors
	Gary D. Creed	
	Mary W. Biggs	
	James D. Politis	
	C. P. Shorter	
	Jeffrey D. Johnson	-County Administrator
	L. Carol Edmonds	-Assistant County Administrator
	Martin M. McMahon	-County Attorney
	Angie Hill	-Financial and Management Services Director
	Bobby Parker	-Public Information Officer
	Judy W. Kiser	-Assistant to the County Administrator

### **CALL TO ORDER**

The Chairman called the meeting to order.

### **PUBLIC HEARING-PROPOSED 2003-2004 BUDGET**

Chairman Rush called the public hearing to order for the purpose of receiving citizens' comments with regard to the Advertised FY 2003-2004 Budget in the amount of \$108,251,879. The Chairman provided a brief overview of the procedure by which the hearing would be conducted, stating that the speakers would be called two at a time; that speakers would be given five minutes each; and that a second public hearing would be conducted with regard to the advertised real estate tax rate for FY 2003-2004 immediately following the conclusion of the budget hearing.

#### **Christopher Walter**

A retired United States Coast Guard and teacher at Christiansburg Elementary School, Mr. Walter addressed the Board of Supervisors in support of a pay increase for teachers. Mr. Walter's current salary after teaching in Montgomery County since 1992 is less than his retirement pay from the United States Coast Guard. His beginning teacher's salary was \$23,875; and after eleven years his salary is now

\$33,474, which amounts to an increase of approximately \$1.05 per day. Mr. Walter believes that teacher salaries have not kept pace with added responsibilities teachers have as a result of the recent “No Child Left Behind Act” established by Congress.

Kathy Calvert said the proposed tax increase is not sufficient to meet the future needs of Montgomery County. Ms. Calvert said requiring County agencies to appear before the Board of Supervisors annually to request funding prevents them from doing a 3-year or 5-year plan because they never know how much money they are to have in their operating budgets. One example she gave was the need for a replacement plan for the school’s fleet of buses. She called the MCPS transportation office and was told that out of a fleet of 111 buses, fourteen are operating with over 200,000 miles on them, and 60 are operating with over 100,000 miles on them, with no allocations in the current budget to replace any of the buses. She urged the Board to adopt the 3¢ tax increase as advertised, and then suggested that everyone then work together to develop a plan to come up with additional revenue sources.

Kelly Roark, President of the Montgomery County Education Association, spoke in support of the advertised 67¢ real estate tax rate. Ms. Roark believes the issue is not vacant buildings, or per pupil spending, or teacher and student ratio, but is funding for the employees of the school system. She asked that the Board of Supervisors adopt the proposed tax rate to begin to help address the lack of funding for teachers, support staff and other school employees.

Victoria Moran, a student at Auburn High School, spoke in support of salary increases for the teachers. She fears that if teachers leave the county to be better compensated elsewhere, exploratory classes for secondary languages will be jeopardized, which will in turn jeopardize students’ chances when applying for college. She alluded to the fact that a lack of good jobs would create a deficiency in our ability to support future retirees in the county.

Hallie Saddler said she was speaking as a taxpayer, a teacher and a parent, in support of the school budget. Ms. Saddler submitted eight letters written by students at Auburn Middle School, supporting salary increases for the teachers. She believes if the Board does not support the school budget, the county will lose teachers at the middle school and the high school because these teachers teach subjects beyond the core classes.

Lois Crismond said that although she supports the teachers getting a raise, she is definitely against a tax increase. She explained that she simply cannot afford to pay more taxes. Ms. Crismond made reference to an article in the newspaper that related a story about a teacher who makes \$45,000 and is about to get foreclosure on her house because she can’t meet the mortgage payments. She asked the Board to consider people who are losing their jobs and the difficulty they will have in paying more taxes.

Russell Duncan urged the Board to adopt a 64¢ tax rate. He knows the teachers could use more money, but he pointed out that there are a lot of farmers, retired people, and people living on a fixed income that simply cannot pay higher taxes.

Bill Teel encouraged the Board to adopt the 64¢ tax rate. Mr. Teel believes the teachers do need more

money but questioned their ability to manager their salaries. He is concerned about people who are working in private industry making about half the amount of teachers salaries, with a lot of these people worried they are going to lose their jobs.

Bill King agreed with Mr. Teel that there are a lot of people working for a lot less money than teachers and have to worry about losing their jobs. He pointed out that teachers have a guaranteed 9-month salary, but has not heard the mention of any teachers interested in summer jobs. He suggested cutting out some of the perks when building new schools, such as private bathrooms for the principals. Cutting out some of the perks would provide funds for teacher salary increases.

Ellen King calculated her tax increase from last year to this year and said if the Board adopts a 64¢ tax rate her taxes will increase \$500 over what she paid in 2002, and if a 67¢ tax rate is adopted her taxes will increase \$600. Ms. King also said she would like for the classroom to be used for teaching the children their lessons, and fears the teachers may be teaching propaganda in bringing teachers salaries into the classroom.

The public hearing on the proposed FY 2003-2004 budget was closed.

#### **PUBLIC HEARING-PROPOSED TAX RATES FOR FY 2003-2004**

Chairman Rush called the public hearing to order for the purpose of receiving citizens' comments with regard to the proposed real estate tax rate of 67¢ for FY 2003-2004. The Chairman provided a brief overview of the procedure by which the hearing would be conducted, stating that the speakers would be called two at a time; and that speakers would be allowed five minutes each.

Arnie Saari assured the Board that it was not his intention to knock anyone's salary, but there are two sides to every coin. Just to put things into perspective, he spoke of the tough economic times, and from all indications it will become worse in the next couple of years. According to independent financial analysts, taxes are going to be more difficult to impose upon citizens and even harder to collect in future years. Mr. Saari said senior citizens have received only a 1.5% to 2% increase in their social security in the last three years. This amounted to approximately \$13 per month increase and \$8 of that had to be paid for medicare premiums. He urged the Board to adopt a 64¢ real estate tax rate.

Rob Styne stressed the need for a good education, but feels the burden of raising assessed property values every four years and the tax rate every year or so is getting to be a little much. There are people in this county living on a fixed income, and times are getting tough, not just here but everywhere. Excessive waste needs to be cut and we need to figure out how to raise revenue for the county without breaking the backs of the people who are working to help feed this country.

Alicia Spitzer, a teacher, said she is married to a blue collar worker, and she makes no where near \$45,000. She said she is proud to be a product, and an employee, of public education, but feels that

public education is being threatened by the requirement that 100% of students are expected to pass SOL tests by 2014 or teachers can be replaced and schools can lose accreditation. She believes the federal government has deserted public school educators by mandating unreasonable educational accountability without funding. Without funding, quality teachers won't come and the ones we have will leave. Ms. Spitzer does not think a 3¢ tax increase is too much to ask if it means that Montgomery County will be able to meet the high expectations of the community and to go on delivering the quality education to which the community is accustomed.

Earl Brown, a senior custodian for Montgomery County Public Schools, spoke in support of a tax increase. Mr. Brown said that he has read the budget information brochure provided by the County explaining that the Board of Supervisors determines the tax rate and provides a lump sum of funding. Specific funding for building programs, inclusion, small class size, school nurses, and employee salaries are determined entirely by the School Board. Simply put, the Board of Supervisors decides how many dollars are available and the School Board decides how they are spent. In speaking with people in other parts of the state, Mr. Brown learned that Montgomery County is known for its good quality of schools; how well the administrators are paid; and low teacher salaries. He urged the Board to step forward and support the School Board in their effort to provide adequate compensation for the teachers in Montgomery County.

Mike Reilly said he was speaking as a classroom teacher in asking for the Board's help in providing a quality education for our children. Mr. Reilly pointed to the latest copy of the New River Valley News and Views, a publication by the New River Planning District Commission, with information on current economic indicators that Montgomery County's population is increasing, our labor force is increasing, and our unemployment rate has dropped to 2.3%. These indicators tell us that we have a healthy economy, our citizens are working, and we can afford a 3¢ or 4¢ tax increase, or more. Mr. Reilly asked that the Board of Supervisors look to the future and adopt a realistic budget and a tax rate that reflects our economic status.

Brownie Cauley, a teacher at Blacksburg Middle School, said a 1¢ or 2¢ tax increase is not enough. Mr. Cauley said this county and the individuals who participate in public education carry an academic reputation to all parts of our country and overseas. International firms and national firms bring in their people and bring in employment. The individuals who work in the school division travel to conferences and educational points of this country and they present what they have developed that reflects favorably on Montgomery County. He asked that the Board consider the impact of not taking the action to provide an increase in teacher salaries so they won't have to come back and look at a larger increase in the future.

David Turman spoke in support of a salary increase for the teachers. As a parent of three children, Mr. Turman believes the quality of education can be maintained by providing salary increases to the teachers. Montgomery County Schools has invested a great amount of money in ongoing training to the present staff and if salaries are not increased he believes it will effect our children directly regardless of typical children or those with special education needs.

Roxana Hartmann has a son attending Blacksburg High School who has autism. Because of the school system's inclusion program, her son is an "A" student. Ms. Hartmann said inclusion is not a place, rather

inclusion is a right given to all children with disabilities and backed by law. When budget decisions are made she asked that all school employees be considered, not only teachers, professionals and administrators, but also the janitors and bus drivers.

Tacy Newell introduced herself as the parent of three graduates of the public school system, and a member of the School Board. After reviewing the county and school system budget information in depth she does not think that 75% of the county's budget goes to support local education. Her first reason is that 51% of the county budget is designated funds, which means that state and federal dollars come to the county treasury specifically intended for certain services, and if these services are not provided then neither are these funds. She also disputed the 75% because for FY 2001-02 she came up with 80%, including \$5.4 million in debt service. For FY 2002-03 she came up with 75% of the amount of the school operating budget. When Ms. Newell looked at the portion of local dollars utilized for the school operating budget, she came up with 40% for FY 2001-02 and 45% for FY 2002-03, including the \$5.4 million for debt service. The School Board was aware that the County Administrator had directed constitutional officers to submit a level funded budget and this was taken into consideration when the school budget was prepared, as well as the general state of the economy and the related potential impact for state and federal funding. Since the county's budget includes funds for salary increases, she wants to offer a salary increase for school employees as well. Concerning vacant school buildings, Ms. Newell said she was willing to work with the Board to expedite the solution.

William Compton said in 1988 he bought a small farm on the edge of Christiansburg which was appraised in 1995 at \$117,800. In 2003 it was appraised at \$324,000, an increase of 175% in seven years. At this rate, he is afraid people are going to be taxed out of their homes. Over the years, Mr. Compton has observed the "politically correct" groups use government to engineer social changes at all levels and to justify increased government spending for purposes they support. He believes that any and all requests for expenditures of tax monies should be questioned and verified as necessary, not just desirable. If fairness is considered important, the immediate reaction to go to an increase in property taxes is unfair. If the Board really wants to know how taxpayers feel about how their money is being spent, he suggested that a list be included of proposed projects and expenditures with the next mailing of tax bills and ask property owners if they want to pay more in taxes. Mr. Compton said he has many years of experience in dealing with government and the public, and very few working people come to public meetings and represent themselves because they are too busy making a living. He feels there is a need to develop a more balanced and evenly applied source of tax monies, at the state level if necessary.

Lois Crismond Although she cannot afford to pay any more in taxes, Ms. Crismond said if the Board approves additional funds for salary increases for teachers, she recommended they require some assurance from the School Board that the additional funds will be used for teacher salaries.

Charlie Bowles made reference to the Board's March 24, 2003 meeting when several teachers spoke in support of an increased tax rate. During that session, the teachers had a drawing for a DVD player. Mr. Bowles contacted the Chairman of the School Board who indicated he was unaware of this and thought it was unfortunate because he had received calls from people complaining about the incident. Mr. Bowles mentioned a recent article in the *Current* section of the *Roanoke Times* where the School Board Chairman

is quoted as encouraging the public to ask the county to set the tax rate higher than the proposed 63¢ so the school board wouldn't have to severely cut programs in order to pay employee raises. Mr. Bowles said he does not oppose the teachers getting a raise, but suggested some cuts be made from the top. Mr. Bowles also criticized the County Administrator for hiring additional employees during the past year while asking that budgets be submitted at level funding. He went on to say that rather than worry about the teachers, he worries about the people working in the gas stations and convenience stores who lose their jobs and can't keep their homes.

Dick Culbertson said he had no problem with the school budget, but does have a problem with the tax rate. Following the reassessment, the *Roanoke Times* ran an article that showed the previous reassessment was \$23,635,000 and the new one was \$36,675,000, which is considerably more than the 33% increase they reported. Mr. Culbertson does not understand how the county came up with a 67¢ rate. He asked that the Board review the figures before a decision is made on the tax rate.

Jimmy Caldwell addressed the reassessment process, saying the assessed value of his property went from \$8,600 to \$29,600. He also addressed salary increases, pointing out that his wife works at Virginia Tech and has not had a raise in several years. Mr. Caldwell said he is employed with Federal Mogul where a lot of people will lose their jobs by the end of the year, and people cannot continue to pay higher taxes when they don't have a job.

John Matherly is retired and living on a fixed income. Over the past four years, Mr. Matherly said he has seen his savings and his quality of life diminish, and asked that the Board give consideration to the citizens in the county who are living on fixed incomes and for those who have lost their jobs. He suggested that more effort be made to collect delinquent taxes from those who go for months and years and never pay their taxes. He believes the teachers deserve a raise, and that money can be found elsewhere, without increasing the tax rate.

Robert Dugan has lived in the county for approximately four years, and thinks it amazing how fast the taxes have gone up. To keep the real estate taxes from being raised Mr. Dugan said he would be willing to pay an annual fee to the recreation center. He also suggested that we increase certain taxes for people to provide services such as licensing for dogs or increase the tax on gasoline to pay for the roads. As an example of high taxes, he said his mother, who lives in Austin, Texas, is 68 years old and still working in order to pay her property taxes. In 1969 the taxes on her house were \$380 and now she pays \$5800.

Brownie Cauley addressed the Board for a second time. He said the Board of Supervisors is getting "beat up" for something that is really not their fault. The problem is with the Commonwealth of Virginia through the Dillon Rule, which restricts the kinds of taxes localities can use to raise revenue. If the citizens of this county and this state would be motivated to take their concerns expressed here tonight and move them to the political arena in such a way that state-level politicians who resist the changes that must be made to lift restrictions from local government, localities would be free to use taxes in a more equitable way.

Reba Spangler said she has a real problem with raising our tax rate 3¢ just to give teachers a raise. If all

county workers, including the teachers, were given a raise, she would be willing to put out the extra, but she is not willing to give one select group a raise. There is inequity when you give one group a raise and don't give the whole group a raise.

Andrea Harris spoke in support of a tax increase to give the teachers a raise. Ms. Harris said she is a history major at Virginia Tech and when people ask her if she plans to be a teacher she always says no. She has two children in the school system, one of which is a special needs child, and she asked that no education funds be cut from the budget.

B. J. Mullins, a teacher in Montgomery County for seventeen years, said she agreed with Mr. Cauley that none of the speakers were in competition. She understands the county is experiencing hardship and she sees the results of that each day when children walk into her classroom. Ms. Mullins believes it is the intention in the current Board of Supervisors budget to provide an increase for county employees, and she doesn't want anyone to have the misconception that teachers are asking for something that no one else will get. The teachers are asking because they were left out, and they want to make sure there is fairness and equity. What it comes down to is that teachers need to make economic decisions for their own personal well being, and they have been trying to tell everyone for a very long time that something is not working, and they need the Board of Supervisors' help.

Bud Thomas, a senior citizen, referenced the preceding speaker's comment about being left out. Mr. Thomas said he thinks all senior citizens in this county are left out. Senior citizens are the people least able to afford tax increases because they are either too old to work, or on fixed incomes. While he agrees that teachers deserve a raise, he suggested that more revenue be raised by increasing the tax on alcohol, rent on town and county property, and charging the students a parking fee at the schools.

Michael Mefford as some of his fellow teachers, Mr. Mefford said he had not planned to speak, but has heard some things that trouble him. He said he could relate to those people expressing their concerns over workers at ElectraTech and Federal Mogul losing their jobs. Mr. Mefford explained that he is the son of a coal miner who has been laid off four times and has lost his pension. He said his father worked very hard to help him with college so he would be able to help someone not have to worry about losing their job in the future.

Beth Holbrook, a teacher, said she moved here in 1986 after teaching in two other school systems. She thinks Montgomery County is an awesome place to live and raise children. Her son has graduated from Blacksburg High School and she asks that the school system be kept as good as it is now so her six-year old daughter will benefit from a good education system. Montgomery County teachers make much less than teachers in surrounding areas, and it is not only lowering morale, but it will encourage the teachers to go elsewhere.

The following letter was submitted for the record:

“Subject: Proposed Raise for Educators

Dear Montgomery County Board of Supervisors:

Today (April 10, 2003) I read an article in the NRV Current section of the Roanoke Times regarding proposed raises for teachers and subsequent proposed tax increases for taxpayers in Montgomery County.

I am 73 years old and have lived in Montgomery County since I was six. I raised four children who were educated in the public school system here in Montgomery County. All four of my grandchildren were also educated here. My great-grandson is a kindergartner here. For 23 years, I worked for Montgomery County. I’m familiar with the school system here and I’m a taxpayer and therefore I feel qualified to address the subject of raises for school employees as well as raising taxes to pay for those proposed salary hikes.

Certainly, everyone should have a raise. It’s important to show how much we value public employees. However, these are lean economic times; everyone may have to learn to be happy with less. It isn’t easy, but as someone who lives on a limited income, I too must live within my means. My retirement income does not necessarily include a tax hike to pay for a 4% increase for school employees. I’m sure that there are other senior citizens living here in Montgomery County who feel the same way I do.

As an alternate suggestion, I would like for the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors to consider a \$500 across-the-board salary increase for all county employees, not just educators. This would help the employees at the bottom of the pay scale—the ones who need it most—while letting other employees know that their contributions are also appreciated. Once the economy improves, I would like the board to consider revising the pay scale so that all county employees receive adequate compensation and are able to provide for their families.

I would like to attend the public hearing tonight, but I am physically unable to do so. I regret that I cannot share my comments with you in person, but hope that you will take this into account.

Thank you,  
Ann D. Hart  
[AnnDHart@aol.com](mailto:AnnDHart@aol.com)”

There being no further speakers, the public hearing was closed.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

On a motion by C. P. Shorter, seconded by James D. Politis and carried unanimously, the Board adjourned to April 14, 2003. The vote on the foregoing motion was as follows:

AYE

NAY



C. P. Shorter	None
James D. Politis	
Annette S. Perkins	
John A. Muffo	
Gary D. Creed	
Mary W. Biggs	
Larry N. Rush	

The meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.